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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of leadership, especially that of the college president, in the application of continuous quality improvement (CQI) principles in higher education. The life history method study focused on William Troutt, president of Belmont University (Tennessee), who has been successfully guiding CQI initiatives at the institution for eight years. The study involved interviews with all members of the senior leadership team and other administrators, and analysis of presidential speeches, board of trustee minutes, and other institution documents. The study identified primary themes of the CQI effort as they relate to personal characteristics of the president and interpersonal dynamics. Personal characteristics identified included a willingness to take risks and to act unconventionally and a determination to learn and grow as a leader. The main themes identified in interpersonal dynamics concerned inspiring commitment and maintaining alignment to the mission and vision, developing relationships of openness and trust, involving and empowering others, and encouraging communication and feedback. Each of the identified themes is illustrated with excerpts from interviews. (Contains 35 references.) (DB)

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Leading Continuous Quality Improvement on Campus: This Train is Going North

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, November 6-9, 1997. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

LEADING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT ON CAMPUS: THIS TRAIN IS GOING NORTH

This is the third phase of a study conducted to understand how the principles of continuous improvement can be successfully implemented in higher education. Phase one reported the results of a national survey of institutions identified as having adopted principles of continuous improvement. Phase two explained the themes that emerged from campus visits to ten institutions that had been involved in the implementation of quality concepts. The qualitative analysis resulted in the creation of a model of quality principles and practices in higher education. Phase three explores the role of leadership in successfully practicing quality principles in higher education. This paper explains *how* a college president leads continuous improvement on campus.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of leadership in continuous quality improvement (CQI) on campus in order to understand at a deeper level *how* leaders successfully implement continuous improvement concepts in higher education. This study puts into context *how* one president behaves in definable ways that sends clear signals to institutional members. A review of the leadership literature in the area of continuous improvement (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1997) advocates creative and supportive leadership. In creating a culture that supports continuous improvement, the themes most often espoused include: leader as teacher and coach, leader as steward, building a shared vision, effective communication and feedback, listening, and developing a systems orientation (p. 131-133). The role of the top leadership is often summarized as:

- building a shared vision
- empowering people and inspiring commitment
- enabling good decisions to be made through designing learning processes (Senge, 1991).

This study investigates *how* one leader actually practices these themes. In other words, *how* is this leader living it and doing it and *how* might others learn from the history of this leader. Based on the experiences of this leader, several themes emerge that increase the understanding of *how* to "walk the leadership talk."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because continuous quality improvement (CQI) originated in business and industry and only since the late 1980s have the concepts been increasingly adopted in higher education institutions (Freed and Klugman, 1997), the literature in both areas was reviewed. It became clear that the president is the person recognized for leading CQI efforts both in organizations and in institutions. "People watch the CEO for signals about what matters and what doesn't" (Filipczak, 1996, p. 60).

The hallmark of higher education institutions should be learning. Phase two of this study indicated that the more committed an organization is to learning, the more committed it is to continuous improvement (Freed and Klugman, 1996). But learning and changing are closely related. "Organizations must learn in order to change, and must be open to change in order to learn" (Tobin, 1993, p. 5). The literature describes the leadership actions needed to lead CQI efforts, but there is a void as to *how* one is to actually put these actions into practice. This study contributes to filling this void by specifically stating *how* to "walk the talk."

Birnbaum (1992) and Nanus (1992) believe most organizations are underled and overmanaged. "Our prevailing system of management has destroyed our people" (W. Edwards Deming, cited in Senge 1990b, p. 7), and 94 percent of the problems in organizations are the results of poor management or are at least the responsibility of leadership (Deming, 1986). As Robert Galvin of Motorola said, "In my estimation, the real test of quality in the early part of the next century is going to be what I call the quality of leadership" (Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton, 1994, p. xi).

According to Senge (1990a) the architect of learning organizations, "leaders are responsible for building organizations where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their future- that is, leaders are responsible for learning" (p. 9). Learning can be defined as "our ability to adapt and change with such readiness that we are seen to change" (Revans, 1981, p. 136). Three primary characteristics of learning organizations include:

- an openness to new ideas
- a culture that encourages and provides opportunities for learning and innovation
- widespread knowledge of the organization's overall goals and objectives and understanding of how each person's work contributes to them (Tobin, 1993, p. 5).

Senge's (1990a) "discipline of mental models" emphasizes the need for reflection on the way we think and act. He states that "the way organizations are is a product of how we think and how we interact: they cannot change in any fundamental way unless we can change our basic patterns of thinking and interacting (1991, p. 38). The leader's role is more than creating an understanding of the vision: "it is to convey the vision in a way that compels the individuals within the organization to claim it enthusiastically as their own" (Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton, 1994, p. 125).

Although Argyris (1991) suggests that most leaders engage in "anti-learning" through their defensive responses to information they find threatening. "Defensive reasoning encourages individuals to keep private the premises, inferences, and conclusions that shape their behavior and to avoid testing them in a truly, independent, objective fashion" (p. 103). Leaders who are focused on learning, "willingly submit their actions to the constructive scrutiny of persistent, but supportive colleagues" (Limerick, Passfield, and Cunnington, 1994, p. 9). "Through a process of self-revelation and reflection, leaders are able to get in touch with why they say the things they do, do the things they do, and value the things they value" (Revans, 1991, p. 10).

Continuous improvement involves making continuous change in order to improve organizations. The role of the leader is significant in all of these actions. Levinson and Rosenthal

(1984) advocate that "strong leaders are necessary, particularly for organizations that must undergo significant change. Not good managers or executives, but strong leaders" (P. 289). But Senge (1996) has been rethinking leadership in the learning organization and has concluded that if the goal is to bring about less authoritarian culture then the result should not be to resort to hierarchical authority. Rather, a different type of leadership is needed to create a culture where change and learning takes place because people trust each other and they share in the leadership responsibility. In order for members to trust one another, leaders need to intentionally drive out fear (Deming, 1986) so that they feel they can make changes and improvements.

Warren Bennis, an authority on leadership, has said that "while leaders come in every size, shape, and disposition--short, tall, neat, sloppy, young, old, male, and female--every leader I talked with shared at least one characteristic: a concern with a guiding purpose, an overarching vision" (Bennis, 1990, p. 44). A shared vision is so critical because it translates learning from a reactive to a proactive process. To build aspiration in the organization, leaders need to create a shared picture that all members seek to bring into being. Without demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment for the vision, leaders cannot ignite the flames of passion and energy in their followers (Koch, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 1987). The vision translates individual learning into organizational action.

Building a shared vision is based on cultivating a commitment among members (Brown, Hitchcock, and Willard, 1994). Commitment is defined as "an intellectual characteristic, a personal attribute that, like honesty, can't be mandated or imposed from the outside" (p. 5). The second step for leaders at all levels is to demonstrate that commitment to others. Senge (1996) differentiates between compliance and commitment. Hierarchical authority is more effective at creating a culture of compliance and a different type of leadership is needed to cultivate a climate of commitment. "There is simply no substitute for commitment in bringing about deep change. No one can force another person to learn, especially when learning involves deep changes in beliefs and attitudes or fundamentally new ways of thinking and acting (p. 2). But, Senge (1990) reminds us that " an organization's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of its members" (p. 6). Modeling the incentive to learn can influence individual employees' incentive to learn (Snyder, Dowd, and Houghton, 1994).

Senge also warns us that "we are losing the art of reflective conversation in our society... "and we have no idea of the loss" (Koch, 1996, p. 1). Instead of wasting time talking to one another in meetings, Senge advocates that organizations create a dialogue that builds "shared meaning." In the words of Jan Carlzon, the legendary CEO of Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS):

> One of the most interesting missions of leadership is getting people on the executive team to listen to and learn from one another. Held in debate, people can learn their way to collective solutions when they understand one another's assumptions. The work of the leader is to get conflict out into the open and use it as a source of creativity (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997, p. 128).

Carlzon continues, "The leader's most important role is to instill confidence in people. They must dare to take risks and responsibility. You must back them up if they make mistakes (p. 129).

New thinking and actions are needed to lead quality improvement efforts. "A leader ... has to engage people in confronting the challenge, adjusting their values, changing perspectives, and learning new habits ... One can lead with no more than a question in hand" (Heifetz and Laurie (1997, p. 134). Top leaders need to allow time for questions, something many leaders do not do. They say they want feedback, but "a lot of people don't take questions because they do not want to hear their employees ragging on them all the time. So they don't want to learn" (Filipczak, 1996, p. 63). "Leaders do not need to know all the answers. They do need to ask the right questions" (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997, p. 124).

Peters and Waterman (1982) identified a "bias for action" and "management by walking around" (MBWA) as characteristics of excellent organizations. Similarly, Senge (1991) relates action to learning: "Learning cannot exist apart from action. Learning is the process for enhancing our capacity for effective action" (p. 39). This happens when members are fully engaged in something that matters.

These themes are summarized in an interview with Richard Teerlink, CEO of Harley Davidson, a company widely recognized for their continuous improvement efforts:

> We have to have continuous improvement. So then you start to devise approaches that support the efforts of people. You support the efforts of people by letting them know what's going on. If they have a clear understanding of what's going on, they will do the right things in most cases (p. 3).

He concluded by saying, "Why don't we just create an environment where people can do great things? We do that by trying to have systems within the organization that support the efforts of people. So we make it easier for people to do business" (p. 5).

METHODS

Data Collection

Data were collected in three phases to answer the research questions. In the first phase, institutions were identified as being involved in quality improvement activities by means of a questionnaire (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1994). In the second phase, data were collected from ten institutions, already identified, that had been implementing continuous quality improvement principles for at least three years. In-depth interviews were conducted with individuals on their campuses to determine quality improvement principles and practices (Freed and Klugman, 1996). The themes that emerged in the second phase are reflected in a model that is illustrated in Figure 1 (Freed and Klugman, 1997).

An analysis of the model (Figure 1) revealed that the role of leadership is woven throughout the model. Leaders are primary drivers of CQI, leaders develop and implement systems to integrate CQI in the culture, leaders can enhance or restrain CQI, and leaders change their style when practicing quality principles. In addition, supportive leadership is critical for successful implementation. In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of *how* leadership works in a continuous improvement environment and *how* leaders drive improvement

efforts and bring about change, phase three used the life history method study. A college president, William Troutt of Belmont University, is the primary subject. All of the members of the senior leadership team who report to the president (provost, vice president for administration and planning, vice president for facilities, vice president of university relations, and director of the Center for Quality) were interviewed. In addition, the executive assistant to the president and assistant vice president for administration and planning, the director of admissions, and the director of The Teaching Center were interviewed. Since Troutt's administrative assistant has been a teammate for approximately his entire tenure, this person was also interviewed. This process was necessary to understand the influence of the president as a leader, to determine how this president interrelates with the people most immediate to him, and to collect their perceptions of the president's leadership actions. Compared to other forms of qualitative research, life history focuses on the individual, is more personal, has a practical orientation, and emphasizes subjectivity (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995).

This study focuses on the practical aspects of leadership and on leader actions. Internal and external publications were collected and analyzed. Presidential speeches, annual reports, alumni magazines are a few of the documents reviewed in order to obtain a broader perspective of the leader being examined and to understand what makes this leader effective (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Because the subjects were not interviewed over a long period of time, 11 years of board of trustee minutes were analyzed to provide a historical perspective of leadership.

The statement that drove the interviews was: Tell me about this person as a leader. All participants were probed for examples and stories to support their statements. In addition, the executive assistant to the president/assistant vice president for administration and planning provided information to the questions: How do you know the institution is successful in improvement efforts? What indicators do you have that support that this is a better institution in 1997 than it was in 1982 when Troutt became president?

Leader and Institution Profile

The subject for this life history method study was William Troutt, president of Belmont University since 1982. Belmont's quality journey began in 1989 after Troutt attended a Deming workshop. The continuous improvement initiatives at Belmont have shown sustained activity throughout the past eight years. Troutt and Belmont University have been involved in every phase of this study. Troutt was selected because of the external recognition he has received as a leader as well as the recognition the institution has received for its continuous improvement efforts.

Facts About Belmont University
Fall 1996 enrollment: 2,929 students
Student/Faculty ratio: 11 to 1
1996-1997 total budget $35.5 million
Affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention

Mission
Belmont University is a student-centered institution dedicated to providing students from diverse backgrounds an academically challenging education in a Christian community.

Vision
To be a premier teaching university bringing together the best of liberal arts and professional education in a consistently caring Christian environment.

Values
Be honest.
Treat every person with respect.
Listen and learn from everyone.

Public Recognition for Quality Efforts
1997 RIT-USA Today Quality Cup Winner
This competition recognizes teams who make significant contributions to the improvement of quality in their organizations.

1995 NACUBO Award
The National Association of College and University Business Officers awarded Belmont the 1995 Innovative Management Achievement Award based on improving the quality and efficiency of higher education in business management, revenue enhancement, and cost reduction.

Tennessee State Quality Award Program
Two achievement awards were presented to Belmont in 1993 and 1994 based on the Baldrige model.

Ernest L. Boyer International Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Technology
One faculty member received this award in 1997. At the time of the award, this faculty member was the founding director of The Teaching Center at Belmont that provides services to faculty members of various disciplines to improve learning and teaching. According to an interview with this faculty member, Troutt was instrumental in providing the vision and in securing seed money for development.

The Deming Medal
In 1997, a professor in the School of Business received this award which is presented to the individual who has demonstrated outstanding leadership in combining statistical thinking and management that leads to quality in products and services.

Sallie Mae Awards Program
The assistant director of financial aid was chosen as one the 1994 winners for implementing innovative programs that assist students in financing their education.

These examples of awards and recognition serve as outside indicators that the culture supports continuous improvement efforts, both on the administrative and academic sides of the institution. Furthermore, these indicators serve to support why Troutt was selected for this study.

To provide more of a historical picture of the institution before and after CQI efforts, data were provided by the director of quality research for 1982 because this was when Troutt became president and for 1997.

Indicator of Success	**Before CQI (1982)**	**After CQI (1997)**
enrollment	1,927	2,926
ACT average of entering class	19.5	24.5
endowment	$2 million (estimate)	$30 million (estimate)

Belmont continuously collects data about stakeholder satisfaction and consistently receives strong positive measures on service/treatment, educational experience, recommendation of family or friends, and image in the community. They consider these satisfaction outcomes as indicators that their efforts are in alignment with their mission and vision. In regard to leadership style, Troutt self-reported that he was more the traditional command control leader in 1982 and gradually has learned to lead by influencing and involving others. This change in leadership style was also confirmed by his senior leadership team.

Data Analysis

As described by Polkinghorne (1995), through an analysis of narratives of the president and all members of the senior leadership team, themes emerge that indicate *how* a leader can demonstrate effective leadership and send specific signals so that positive change occurs in institutions. The data collected through narratives, official institutional records, and printed documents were analyzed according to the constant comparative method as described by Guba and Lincoln (1985). This method was used for self-reported data and data collected from others (Patton, 1990). Similar to how Lincoln and Guba (1985) borrowed from Glaser and Strauss (1967) to identify themes and categories, the data were analyzed as a way of providing rich description of experiences rather than developing theory.

Throughout the data analysis, an interesting pattern emerges of the similarity in processes of qualitative research and continuous improvement. Throughout the years of this history, the data change and become more refined. Results continue to emerge based on the data at the time and improve by additional data and further analysis.

Findings: Leadership in Action

Several themes and patterns are identified in this study that have significance for people in positions of leadership who are trying to implement change and improvements within organizations. The leadership literature is clear about what leaders should do to drive continuous improvements efforts in higher education institutions (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1997) and in business and government organizations (Schmidt and Finnigan, 1993; Snyder, Dowd and Houghton, 1994; Brown, Hitchcock and Willard, 1994). However, little is said about *how* to enact the characteristics advocated in the literature.

The primary themes are grouped under the categories of personal characteristics and interpersonal dynamics.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The data indicate that Troutt has changed his leadership style since becoming involved in continuous improvement efforts. From when he became president until the current time, people believe he is more open to feedback, more likely to involve others in decision making, and much less controlling. This was the case for self-reported data and data collected from others. As stated by one administrator:

> *All I want is for him to have confidence in my work. I have seen him really improve on that since I have been here. He has improved on his ability to express his own strengths and weaknesses and his ability to express what he needs from you.*

In reviewing documents and speeches, the tone reflects his emphasis on building a shared vision by reminding members of what is important to the institution and in turn important to them. This change in leadership style supports the literature that leadership is learned (Sherman, 1995; Whetten and Cameron, 1995). The personal characteristics emerge under two categories: willingness to take risks and unconventional actions; determined to learn and grow as a leader.

Willing to Take Risks and to Act Unconventionally

Troutt became president of Belmont in an unconventional way. At the age of 32, he served as executive vice-president for 18 months with Dr. Gephart, president of Belmont for 23 years. During the 18 months, Troutt became familiar with Belmont, visited Baptist churches and associations, and concentrated on strategic planning. After the 18 months, Troutt became president of Belmont. Most interviewees considered the position as executive vice-president beneficial for Troutt and for the university. Gephart continues to serve in the roles of unpaid chancellor and Troutt's mentor and supporter. This type of transition is not common and says a great deal about the confidence in Troutt as a leader and about the culture of the institution.

Troutt put it this way:

> *One thing that is a good practice for all successors is to have respect for who came before you, whether you agree with his or her ideas, or whether the person was successful or not. Sometimes leaders try to change things too quickly.*

It became clear that he seeks out the people who best support his vision for the institution. Several people on his senior leadership team do not have the traditional higher education background, but they believe in the values and mission of the institution. Troutt is willing to make unconventional decisions when it comes to selecting people with whom to work. He appointed a female, non-Baptist senior administrator which contradicts traditions in the church and in higher education. Another member of the team is a retired minister and long-time friend, now Belmont's director of the Center for Quality. Instead of hiring a development officer from another institution, he hired someone out of business and industry and is comfortable with this person engaging in some innovative advertising and promotion strategies. As one administrator admitted:

> *Bill has worked hard and spent a great deal of time on quality improvement. He has been willing to put a lot of his credibility on the line.*

In the late 1980s, Troutt was willing to risk gradually increasing the average ACT score of the incoming class from 17-19-21-24. He was determined to attract better quality students as a reflection of a better quality institution. This is a risky strategy in an institution that is tuition driven. It was said that he also received some resistance from the Baptists because many would prefer an open enrollment situation for Baptists who want an education. But as one administrator commented:

> *I think he made the decision that we would like to be a Baptist institution that stressed quality.*

Despite the resistance, enrollment continues to increase and the honors program has tripled. The institution is attracting a different kind of student since this strategy has been followed.

Since engaging in quality practices, it was commonly expressed that Troutt acts less presidential:

> *He used to be really presidential and that is a change I have also seen. Now he can have a squirt gun fight with me. In fact, we have a picture of that at the Fish Fest. He even dressed up for Halloween and wore an earring. That is not a presidential thing.*

Since the name of "Troutt" lends itself to a fish theme, they present the bronze, traveling Big Fish award whenever they feel someone deserves recognition for their efforts. They have had a Fish Fest on his birthday that included games with fishing poles, fish cards, fish squirt gun contests, and Playdough contests for making the best fish. Taking an active role in the campus events

makes people feel more comfortable. Every Friday is dress down day at Belmont which is considered a barrier breaker. "People will go in the president's office and talk to him when he is dressed down and they are dressed down, where otherwise they would not."

Another theme that emerged is how Troutt leads by getting involved and playing a role in various aspects of the institution. One example is how he is makes a two hour presentation on quality improvement concepts during new faculty orientation. He also teaches a leadership class for first year students each year because he feels that he wants to demonstrate "persistent, consistent, credible behavior."

As these actions illustrate, Troutt is not afraid to show his vulnerability or to show his abilities. He takes risks, gets involved in unconventional activities, and takes an active role. He leads through actions and he sets a tone so that others follow.

Determined to Learn and Grow as a Leader

One strong theme is Troutt's commitment to learning. He talks about leadership, writes about it, reads about it, and does it. For several years, he has given up one Saturday morning a month to go and learn from people he admires in leadership positions, much like an apprentice. He will take time off and instead of going on a vacation, he takes time to study:

> *Learning is important to me and evaluating things. I am working on articles with titles such as Representation, Renewal, Reflective Leadership, and The Work of a Leader and I would like to turn them into some sort of publication that would help people understand leadership. My hope is to bridge the gap between theoretical material which many people buy, but do not read and the simple books that people read, but they may not have much substance. I want to help practitioners. So I would like to make these articles into meaningful messages, not just for the world, but also to help me reflect on my work.*

In addition to learning through reading, he also spent a summer sabbatical shadowing some of the most recognized leaders of continuous improvement in business and industry, companies such as: Hanover Insurance, Herman Miller, Harley Davidson, Procter and Gamble, and Ritz Carlton. According to Troutt, this was a time "to examine organizations from which I thought I could learn something about changing cultures." He also visited local people with whom he thought he could learn, such as a civil rights person in Nashville. One administrator described this study time as a time during which Troutt got them to be honest with him and shared his frustrations with them:

> *He let these leaders talk into his life. He also did a lot of reading, but I think the going and being in the presence of these leaders was more important than what he read.*

By doing such apprenticeships, he made himself vulnerable to other leaders. This summer leave is an example of *how* he is determined to learn *how* to "walk the talk."

Another example of his commitment to learning and to supporting the learning of others is The Peer Learning Network. Troutt and the former chairman of Columbia/HCA Healthcare

Corporation created an organization that brings chief executive officers together in a setting where they can learn from each other. The goals of the program are to:

- share "best practices" with other non-competing companies;
- dialogue with world class resource people;
- provide opportunities to the members for developing cross-corporation relationships which promote further learning and sharing.

This organization sponsors world class people who spend time in Nashville and at Belmont. Presentations are open to members of the community and to Belmont students. Speakers have included Jack Welch, Stephen Covey, Peter Senge, Joel Barker, Bill O'Brien, Richard Teerlink, and Peter Block, to name a few. Troutt believes the Network enhances the university's image in the Nashville community, but he particularly stresses learning:

> *The overriding principle behind the formation of the Peer Learning Network is an attitude of mutual cooperation, support, and above all, learning.*

Several administrators mention how he studies his work. Troutt uses the term "reflecting on his work" and emphasizes the power of reviewing and critiquing demonstrated actions and behaviors. It was said that he uses reflection as a methodology with people openly and privately. Based on his experience, he believes that life is more interesting when he reflects on his practice and tries to learn from his experiences. Similarly, he has learned that leadership is about doing, but it is also about influencing. The following comments support this sentiment:

> *It has taken me awhile to learn the influencing part because there are great reinforcements on the doing side. Leaders get rewards for being heros. But ultimately you want an organization where heros and heroines are not needed because you have effective processes in place and a system that understands how the parts work together.*
>
> *I have learned that leadership is about influencing, changing cultures, understanding systems, and this is a different kind of work.*
>
> *Part of learning is continuing to revisit things that I think I have learned. This is a very important practice to me.*
>
> *I wanted to learn how to align the institution around what we understand about human behavior.*

These personal comments were also supported by members of his senior leadership team. Perhaps one member said it best:

> *He studies hard. He works at it. But I think every organization takes on the character of the leadership. I think Belmont has taken on the character of Bill Troutt. What you see*

is what you get with Bill. He is a soft spoken person, but he can make the tough decisions.

He is respected because he demonstrates credible behavior. Interviewees describe him as caring, genuine, and consistent in his actions. His actions match his words and he works at maintaining the congruency:

I see him working longer hours than anyone while striving to maintaining a balance. He respects others and others respect him. Not just in a meeting, but also in solicitation. The manner in which we approach donors is sincere. The caring way we approach all of our stakeholders demonstrates everything about who he is and who Belmont is and how we operate.

He is a delight to work with. I can't imagine a working relationship that could be any better than ours. We have worked together for a long time that we almost think alike. But he makes tough decisions and he is not afraid of that. Once he has made a decision he is comfortable with it.

It is a great privilege to work with him. Not only him, but the team he has put together. It is a great community with whom to work.

INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS

The main themes that emerge under interpersonal dynamics have to do with building a shared vision and driving fear out of the institution. His words and actions are focused on aligning members to a vision and mission that drives their words and actions. Likewise, his words and actions are consistently focused on making people feel comfortable to give feedback, to receive feedback, and to learn from decisions made. In the words of one administrator:

He is always open and trusts people. He will say that maybe we should make this happen. I know that I can go and make it happen, using continuous improvement concepts, not using a baseball bat. But we can make it happen, and I know that unless I have made a bad decision which does not happen too often because I know how he thinks ... he will support my decision and he is going to be there for whatever question I might have.

According to Troutt, "I want Belmont to be a wonderful place to work." This statement is printed in their commentary on Belmont's Governing Ideas, he expressed this sentiment to me, and others affirmed that his goal is to create a place where people find meaning in their work.

One strategy used by administrators to implement change is to lay a bread crumb trail:

> Coordinated action within organizations requires that any given member 'edit' his or her concerns into a smaller number of items that can be comprehended by others. Repetition of these concerns is almost always necessary to gain the attention of others and convince them of serious intent (Huff, 1985 p. 175).

Analysis reveals that Troutt repeatedly uses this strategy as evidenced in board of trustee minutes through his president's report to the board. A few examples include the four year process of changing the name of the institution from college to university, increasing the average ACT score of the entering first year class from 19.5 to 24.5, and building the current momentum and progress of the continuous improvement efforts from 1989 until now.

Even though he uses the strategy of laying a bread crumb through repetitious words and acts to lead change and improvement efforts, a better metaphor emerged through the analysis of the narratives; **"this train is going north**." Several participants mentioned Troutt's speech about "train going north." They remembered this speech in the context that he was going to change the direction of the institution and he was asking for their commitment to this change. When a copy of the speech was requested, Troutt sent the following response:

> *The "train going north" was not a set of remarks. It came at the end of an internal planning group retreat some years ago. It simply articulated my firm belief that we must move to a new way of leading via quality improvement and that everyone in senior leadership must get on board or get off the train ... It was an important time to be clear about direction.*

Interestingly, the title to his inaugural address in 1982 was "A Vision of Quality", although Belmont recognizes 1989 as the year they embarked on the continuous quality improvement journey. This indicates that Troutt had a vision in 1982, but he was patient enough to align members and to build a culture that would allow the institution to pursue this vision. **"This train is going north"** is a metaphor that more accurately reflects the power of vision in leading institutional members.

The themes that emerge about building a shared vision and driving out fear are not concrete categories, but rather they are themes that overlap and support one another. Troutt builds a shared vision and drives out fear by:

- Inspiring commitment and alignment to the mission and vision;
- Developing relationships of openness and trust;
- Involving and empowering others;
- Encouraging open communication and feedback.

The themes emerge out of the literature and out of the data. They explain *how* Troutt puts principles of continuous improvement into practice. These interrelated themes are the processes he uses of getting everyone onto the train going north.

Inspiring Commitment and Alignment to the Mission and Vision

When asked about vision, several members immediately referred to Troutt's "train is going north speech." They had vivid memories of how these comments changed the direction of the institution. One story best illustrates the power of that speech:

> *I remember when we had a meeting with the vice presidents. He asked us where we wanted to go as an institution, what is our dream, and I think the expression was, 'This train is going north and I hope you see fit to stay on board but if you do, I want a commitment.' He wanted to change the whole direction, the way we do business, the way we relate to each other, the way we relate to students. It has been an exciting time.*

Although there are no prescriptive steps to creating a shared vision, Troutt said:

> *This is a tricky business. We know when we see organizations that have a vision. It is real and it has vividness, people feel it and in the ideal sense people know how their work area and their work processes relate to the vision.*

One of the first actions Troutt took in 1989 was to lead the institution through the process of writing vision and mission statements. Stakeholder representatives got together and spent the day answering questions that would help Belmont address their purpose and dreams. Professional writers were used to wordsmith the statements. During the summer of 1989, conversations were held in small groups for the purpose of reacting to the statements. The feedback was negative. In the words of one administrator:

> *The development of our vision is another example of Bill's leadership. We went through the process of including faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and students. In retrospect, we made the mistake of including professionals from outside of the institution. They took notes and wrote the statement. When we rolled it out, members said that they did not think that was our vision. This was a great example of Bill's leadership because he said to throw it out. We broke faculty and staff into small groups, and senior leadership facilitated meetings. We brainstormed on what Belmont should be in the future. It took several more months, but at the end of the time it became clear that the vision of the Belmont centered around 1) teaching, 2) combination of professional education and liberal arts, and 3) Christian community. The senior leadership team wrote the final vision statement.*

According to Troutt, the vision statement is powerful in driving the actions of members:

> *Everybody talks about the vision and understands it. When faculty members are asked in their first, third, and fifth year interviews about how their teaching relates to the vision, we talk about it. I think our basic stakeholder groups understand it and we try to spend money in light of it, and it is pretty real here.*

Likewise, another administrator affirmed that members understand the vision:

> *We had an accreditation team on campus last year and one of the things they said on exit was they had never been on a campus where every single person they met had been able to quote the vision statement. So I think we have really permeated the campus with the vision and encouraged each individual to develop their own vision in relationship to that.*

Another administrator added the following perspective:

> *I have seen different types of leaders, but many leaders still can't let go of control and let people make mistakes or let people do things differently. They think their way is the only way. At Belmont, it is the recognition of the grand scheme, the big picture, and the knowledge that if everybody understands where we are going, we have a good chance of getting there.*

Keeping stakeholders focused on a common vision for the institution is a clear theme that emerges. One strategy Troutt uses is to act out what he is thinking through presidential messages included in alumni magazines or internal newsletters to staff. A sample of titles reflect this patterns:

- Making Belmont Even Better
- The President's *Back-toSchool Essay*
- Learning with a Capital "L"
- Belmont Must Have a Vision
- Belmont is a Place Where You Can Make a Difference
- Belmont's Stewardship of Resources
- Partnerships Link Education and Industry for Mutual Benefits

Also woven throughout Troutt's comments to the board of trustees over 11 years, is a continual emphasis on mission and vision. Repeatedly, there are references such as:

> *A new plan is needed. We need to review our mission. Who are we? Why do we exist? Whom do we seek to serve? Are we meeting the needs of our constituency? (9/1985)*

> *We need to clarify our vision. Belmont is one of the few places that could do all of the things contained in this vision statement. The future of Belmont is very exciting. (3/1991)*

> *We are clarifying our vision. All employees are invited to meet in small groups to dialogue about the vision statement. (6/1991)*

> *We are still working on the vision statement. We want a statement that will be a force in people's hearts. (9/1991)*

The vision is becoming a powerful force in people's hearts. I am grateful to those who want to be a part of making Belmont University a better place and I want to be a facilitator for drawing out the kind of passion to make it happen. (6/1994)

The board needs to put the finances on sounder footing if it is to realize the dreams embodied in the vision statement. (12/1995)

As these comments illustrate, Troutt intentionally uses the mission and vision statements to provide the guiding force in making decisions. His continual use of the language and tying actions taken to these statements serve to inspire commitment and alignment to a shared vision.

Another commonality mentioned by interviewees is that Troutt makes his expectations clear. People seem to know how he wants them to serve stakeholders because they understand his vision and they share that vision:

I watch how he interacts with people and I follow his lead.

He expects me to do my job and he has trust in me to do a good job. It makes you want to share that same style with all of the people with whom you work. So I do not expect my direct reports to ask permission for everything. It is a cascading process.

He is always reminding me to get across to people what he wants on the front end. Get them to think like he does and I am trying to do so. It takes a lot of repetition about this is what I want and I am not going to go back and forth on that, but you know where the bottom line is. It is always in favor of the customer.

It was interesting to hear his senior leadership team talk about clear expectations. Perhaps the words of two administrators are worth repeating:

I don't have to see him everyday. I may go for weeks and never see him, but I know where he is and I know how he thinks. I know how he is going to respond. But I also know when we need to run ideas before Bill.

Many leaders have trouble communicating what they need from their staff. I think they assume that if you made it to this level of responsibility, you should know what the leader expects of you. They probably think that it will reveal their own insecurities. Bill has improved on expressing what he needs from me and I am glad to do it. I want him to tell me what he wants so that he has confidence in my work.

Likewise, Troutt wants to know what others expect of him. He described an exercise that he engaged in with his staff that he found to be helpful in clarifying expectations:

A few years ago, I had my colleagues write a job description for me. It was a way for me to measure my own progress and that is one thing I would do if I were to go somewhere

else. It is important to have a sense of what other people expect from me. They wanted me to be a big picture guy, thinking long-term and being Belmont's primary external person. I have tried to become faithful to that covenant so I don't focus on operations now.

According to Troutt, a shared vision is developed by listening to those you serve:

I think ultimately that leaders have to share their vision, from a personal sense of things, but that is formed as you really listen.

To the contrary, one member of the team expressed the importance of the leader's feedback:

Making change in higher education is difficult. It is two steps forward and one step back. If you are a change agent in higher education, you have to think of ways to think outside of the box. You have to have a Bill Troutt out there who is reminding you of the boundaries or the vision.

Data from all sources imply that building a shared vision is easier in an institution with a religious affiliation. The inference is that members already share common values. The following two quotations are representative of this theme:

We are making progress in helping people see Belmont as a Christian community bound not by rules, regulations, and structure, but by a common aspiration.

The members are people who believe and are active in their faith. I think the professors who come to Belmont come because they want to teach and we are a teaching institution. But I think many of our professors feel that this is where the Lord wants them to be at this time in their life. I think there is a real sense of calling here.

Developing Relationships of Openness and Trust

One important aspect to Troutt's leadership is that he creates a culture of openness and trust. Several people stressed how he trusts others so others trust him and this reciprocal system feeds on itself. The more he trusts them, the more they trust him. As one member said, "We have had to develop trust over time." According to him:

The nice thing about CQI is that when I walk away from the institution, I walk away from it. I used to call in a lot when I was leading in a different way. Now I just don't do that unless I have a reason. I feel very comfortable being gone and either not thinking about it or thinking about it in the long term, big picture ways that have nothing to do with operations. I think that is an interesting indicator itself.

I have an enormous amount of confidence in the people here and a growing sense of peer accountability. I don't have to be here for the institution to run effectively. Besides having a competent set of people, we have a growing sense of processes in place to make things happen without any sort of controlling behaviors.

The members of his leadership team feel trusted. Trust is a pattern throughout their comments:

Bill creates trust by trusting people. I know he trusts me. It is difficult not to be trustworthy when somebody trusts you. One of the biggest lessons that most leaders have not learned is that you create trust by trusting people.

Bill is a very obedient Christian. I put him on a pedestal with some of the best leaders I have ever seen. He has the gift of intellect, the ability to work hard, and yet he is open, honest, and a lot of people trust him.

Since 1989 I have seen him very purposefully and sometimes with great difficulty let go of control. He has let go of the operational details and turned those over to other people. I have seen him develop trust in other people and that has been a wonderful thing to watch. He does trust well. And as a person he trusts, that is a blessing.

Another way he creates trust and drives out fear is to encourage confrontation. He wants feedback and he wants to hear voices of opposition all in the name of improvement. This aspect is described as follows:

I know that he trusts me, but he also wants me to confront him in a way that builds him up and not tears him down. He wants constructive feedback. He understands that confrontation and feedback is to make folks better.

He depends on me and others to confront him. If he is the problem, we are to tell him. I feel that of all the qualities that Bill has as a leader, this characteristic sets him apart. This is a unique quality to say that you can inform him of his faults.

There is a faculty member who really bugged Bill because he was so outspoken. I suggested to Bill that we make him a member of the internal planning group and Bill said that he had been thinking the same thing. So rather than isolate a person who is a thorn in the side, he includes the person because he understands that the voice is important.

Creating a culture of openness and trust is a continual process and includes the smallest of decisions and actions. As several of the quotations listed above infer, members watch and monitor the behaviors of leaders. How leaders respond to human resource issues influences how members feel about the institutional culture:

When the question comes down to do you do the right thing or do you do the most expedient, or easiest thing that will get you out of the mess the quickest, Bill always takes the high road.

He is often compassionate where I might not be. There have been instances where my recommendation was this person needs to leave and be gone right now. He will wait and consider how much service the person has given to the institution. Then he will try to work out a solution. This does not mean that he can't make the tough calls. He will make the tough calls when absolutely necessary.

Troutt believes in the value of teams and trusts their work. So it was not surprising that people kept giving examples of how he trusts their judgement:

It takes a willingness on the part of the president to trust the team to make the decision. Most of the teams simply make a report back. They tell the senior leaders what they decided, what the process was, and what the decision was.

The voices of those who work with and for Troutt support that he creates a culture of openness and trust. Once people are trusted, it is natural to involve and empower them in as many ways as needed so that the institution can continuously improve.

Involving and Empowering Others

A pattern became clear that he surrounds himself with people who are on the same page as he is and this has facilitated moving the train north. A comment made by the provost provides this background:

I had been on a parallel track with Bill by focusing on participatory management and involving people. So when he became excited about quality improvement we were in sync.

This is an important element because as Troutt concluded:

Changing a culture is not a solo act. You have to have others at the top of the organization believing in quality and modeling that.

An interesting pattern emerged about *how* Troutt interacts with his leadership team. He treats them as confidants, clarifies his expectations, and asks for their opinions. This was expressed in a number of ways:

In one way, people would say he has hired a good staff who understand continuous improvement. I think that is not true. We are good, but the difference is that because we care about who he is as a leader, we are self-motivated to help him succeed.

Being a president is a lonely job and I think he needs a sounding board. He can say things to me that he knows I won't repeat.

When he is stressed out, we talk. He can unload his frustrations on the faithful. He knows I will be candid with him. I think every leader needs someone who he or she can absolutely trust, not only to be confidential, but to be honest. I think it is hard to be an effective leader without someone who can play that role.

We know his expectations because usually an action item follows feedback. He surrounds himself with people who understand feedback. I think the main thing he does, even when he delegates, is that people feel like their ideas have been followed through and not discounted.

He is very good at having people in various programs and departments who he routinely consults. He drops by their offices and asks how things are going on a regular basis. He asks them to give him a reading of what concerns the faculty.

One administrator mentioned the important role that Troutt's spouse plays in his success:

I think he has a good partner. She is always thinking of ways to support him, to organize activities for Belmont, and to entertain for him and for Belmont. I consider her a big part of his success because she helps him with his validation of himself and the work he does.

Two stories provide specific actions on the part of Troutt to involve and empower others:

I am constantly uncovering decisions that he disagreed with, but he did not intervene or keep the decision from being made. This includes little things like our communications office sending letters to people or big things like the university having a major event on campus. He allows decisions to be made because a person in an authority position made the decision. He doesn't alter a decision, stop it, or intervene because he realizes that doing such would have a negative result in the future.

We developed a new viewbook and it was like night and day from what Belmont previously had. A person from the publishing company and I were showing the proof boards to Bill. He was noticeably taken back and it was clear that he was not impressed. I had done the research, but he needed time to think about it. He came down to my office later that afternoon, on my turf, sat down across from me and the person from the company and said, 'I am not sure what I think about this, but what do your customers say?' I told him that we had done the market research, tested it in four local high schools, across demographic spectrums, and showed him the result of our market tests. His reply was, 'If our customers like it, then it is going to give us the market we need. I am through being king around here.' I will never forget it as long as I live. I know

where his heart is. I know what he is trying to do and I know how hard that was for him to trust my judgement over his. I had to have valid research, but he let me make it happen. He actually learned to love the viewbook.

Encouraging Communication and Feedback

Several patterns emerge in regard to communication. Troutt is much more open with information, uses repetition as a key to communication, expresses his vulnerability, asks questions, and welcomes feedback. There was a general consensus that Troutt has changed how he communicates. Everyone felt that he is much more open with information since his involvement with CQI. He believes that you have to be very public about your intentions and that you have to allocate time to explaining *why* certain actions were taken. As Troutt remarked, "One of the trip wires I found is that people want to know why." This pattern was reflected in the board minutes also. Information that was traditionally considered to be private has become public:

Things like budget, salaries, policies, and processes are more accessible. There has been a significant change in knowing salary ranges by rank. The information has become available on what we call Public which is on-line. I don't have to ask permission.

In the last eight years we have had this complete atmosphere of openness. One of the strong points of his leadership style has been a real desire to keep the communication channels open. He works hard to listen to faculty and the different stakeholders of Belmont.

Most senior leaders are hard to talk to, but that is a change I have seen in him. He wants to be more forthright. He converses with people, is at ease with them, jokes with them in a way that is special to their needs. With a group of senior executives, he can play the business game and understands the significance of that. He meets their needs and expectations.

When asked what he specifically does to communicate effectively, he said the key is to open up a dialogue and then use the power of repetition. In the words of Troutt:

If you can have invitational conversations so that people can come in and ask you anything, then you can start to share the things that are important. That is quite meaningful because you can start a dialogue and they can come to understand what you are saying and you can understand better what they are doing ... You have to stay with it and you have to flood the organization with information. When you start to assume that everyone knows, they probably don't. It is hard to over-resource information sharing.

Try to get a conversation going about what are the aspirations collectively and individually in the organization. What are the barriers before those aspirations?

> *Usually the barriers revolve around trust and communication. There is usually an information shortage, a trust shortage, and an abundance of fear. In addition to listening, you need to flood the organization with real information.*

Another administrator offered an additional perspective on the value of repetition:

> *We think that once we have written it down and said it that everyone gets it. But we have turnover all of the time so everyone's concept is a little bit different. The challenge as a leader is to constantly, through everything that is done, support that vision and mission.*

Not only does Troutt believe in being open with information, but he also thinks most information should be as public as possible. He summarized the importance of sharing information in a public way:

> *This whole business of flooding organizations with information is a big deal. People are nourished by information. They don't starve without it, but they go in different directions because they make up their own and that is not a healthy thing. The information that is made up is not very good.*

An interviewee shared this story as an example of being public about intentions:

> *Belmont was in the process of buying additional land for housing units. The deal was to be settled on Monday. Bill e-mailed faculty and staff that he had an announcement to make and then he called a forum for Friday. He informed them of the deal, but told everyone to keep it confidential. There were about 75-100 people there and he was asking them to keep it confidential for a weekend. He trusted everyone to keep it confidential.*

Another commented:

> *We have a campus-wide staff meeting every month. It is an open forum and Bill will periodically appear before that meeting, as he does before faculty, and tell us what is happening and inform us of things of interest. He just lays it out for everybody. They can ask him anything they want to ask him.*

In order to be more open with communication, he has changed some of the communication systems. On a regular basis, he calls open forums to make people feel included. He used open forums when developing the vision and mission statements. If there is a concern of stakeholders, he will host an open forum. Topics have included salary concerns, CQI terminology and concepts, and long term plans. For a period of time, Troutt held a weekly or biweekly forum when there were issues with which to deal. He offers a variety of times so that most people have a chance to attend. Typically, he uses e-mail to announce the forums. For example, Troutt was recently a finalist for another presidency and he used the e-mail system to open up communication

channels. This was his way of making his intentions public:

> *When I decided I was going to be in this public presidential search, I sent the campus an e-mail message. I told them exactly what was going on, and I poured some meaning into it because I said what it meant to me. I think that was helpful when the announcement came out in the public press. They appreciated being informed. It is terrible when members get information about the organization from the outside.*

Troutt communicates most effectively when he lets others realize that he is vulnerable as a leader. Continuous improvement has made him realize that he is not perfect and others do not expect him to be perfect; there is always room for improvement. The question becomes, "How can I improve?"

> *He is able to convey acceptance rather than rejection by his mannerisms and tone of voice. He reassures people who get down. I think the biggest leadership trait is that he admits his own weaknesses. He just says, I messed up. He has learned that there is strength in weakness and there is weakness in strength.*
>
> *He understands the power of self-disclosure. He can say to others that he has been there and done that. He is not perfect and he does not expect us to be either.*
>
> *He admits that CQI is a struggle. He will say that continuous improvement is hard work and in my former life I would have done so and so. Or, it is hard to do the right thing. He communicates that it is a struggle, but that it is a valuable struggle.*

Even Troutt's speaking style is perceived to be different because of his practice of being open:

> *He used to give very prepared remarks. Now his most successful speaking engagements are conversational. He is best when he is just himself, talking openly. He is so genuine.*

According to those members who report to Troutt, because of CQI he has learned to focus on the process and not the person:

> *One of the things that Bill has come to learn and espouse, if we have a problem it is a process problem and not a personnel problem. That is not to say that we don't have personnel problems, but our first thought is, what is wrong with the process?*
>
> *Bill blames less. Before CQI, if something went wrong, someone was at fault but that was ten years ago. That is not Bill Troutt anymore.*

Another pattern that emerges is his ability to employ a questioning technique. This was pointed out in interviews and it became clear in how he interacts with the board of trustees. He

leads by continually asking questions. For example:

> *He will say things like, 'I had not thought of it that way, what do you think?' He might say, 'I am not sure I agree with you, but I really want to understand what you are saying. Say it one more time in a different way.' It is a probing behavior to make sure that he understands.*

At board meetings, there is a clear pattern of breaking into small groups and asking them to brainstorm on a few questions that relate to the vision and mission. There is also a pattern of proactively involving various stakeholders (i.e. students, staff, faculty, and community members) in small group discussions. Examples of the questions include:

> *What do the trustees need to do to be more involved in the next four years in development, in implementing the strategic plan, and in recruiting students and faculty?*
>
> *How can we best use the time and talents of the trustees? How can we best use the time and talents of faculty and staff? How can we best use the time and talent of others who believe in Belmont University?*
>
> *What is Belmont doing right? What can make Belmont an ideal place?*
>
> *How do you as trustees measure your success and effectiveness?*

In addition to using questions to drive trustee meetings, Troutt changed the paradigm for meetings since engaging in CQI. In 1990, he informed the board that there would be new meeting times, new places to meet, and a new format for the meetings. The format would rely on having the trustees take a more active role in shaping the future of the institution. The pattern has been to include people who have expertise on selected topics on the board agenda. This is a way for board members to experience firsthand the issues on campus. Strategies have included bus tours, team reports, and presentations from community leaders. The goal is to share information so that everyone can share the same vision.

Several members mentioned how Troutt has a real sense of serving and this attitude makes him welcome feedback. He, himself, pointed out that when people feel they can be honest and candid is when meaningful change happens. Troutt shared the following situation:

> *One thing we have done fairly well is humble ourselves, submit ourselves to feedback, and be willing to do something about it. A few years ago we surveyed the staff when they had enough trust in the process to give fairly direct, honest feedback. What we received was a fairly negative report about the trust level, the communication level, the fear level in the organization. It was quite humbling. When Deming talks about driving out fear, you assume he is talking about somebody else. A critical moment for me was being able to be open to feedback and to mobilize folks to do something about the feedback received. We really started to listen to the people around here.*

He made a statement that ties together so many themes:

> *There need to be some public acts that at least speak to accessibility, willingness to listen, respect and appreciating others' perspective.*

This statement was supported by others. As one member reflected:

> *Bill follows an open door policy, but he has made a point of being visible. He eats in the cafeteria, walks around, talks to students, talks to faculty. Many of our conversations have been in my office when he would drop in unannounced just to talk. I have had few conversations with him in his office. Just like I have tried to extend the classroom outside the parameters of the room, he has extended his impact outside his office. He has made an intentional effort to get out on campus and talk to people. I think most people see him as being very accessible.*

Accessibility is important in opening up communication, but at Belmont, Troutt is not a lone ranger concerned about being accessible. Working together with the senior leadership team, actions are taken so that he is perceived as more accessible. For example:

> *His name may be on the e-mail, but the message is from his administrative assistant. She helps him see what is important. He gets little heads up reports. One of the things that I think I help him do and others also, is we send him something that says, 'I think you need to know that this is going on. You don't need to do anything.' So when he sees someone and they mention it to him, he has got a heads-up to talk about it. I don't think these actions were anything that we were formally told to do, but we want him to be successful. So those of us who work for him try to think of ways to help him be successful.*

Troutt continues to explain how the senior leaders have come to be honest and acknowledge when leadership is the barrier. He attributes this turning point in leadership to when they started accepting feedback from staff and from one another:

> *I found out in my earlier days here, no one told the president bad news or negative things. Once we got over that hurdle, we made significant progress. We are not a perfect organization, but people feel like they can give as direct and honest feedback as they would like.*

According to Troutt, "This thing about bottlenecks being at the top of the bottle are really pretty much right on target." Therefore, Troutt has made a conscious effort to self-reflect and not feel defensive about feedback. He told a story related to a visit with Don Schon, author of *The Reflective Practitioner*:

I went to see him and often in this kind of situation you are thinking about the kinds of questions to ask to impress this person that you have read what they have written. Instead, he asked me to state my biggest problem at Belmont. I said it is the vice presidents and deans because they do not seem to be candid and honest. And he said, 'Well Bill, how candid and honest are you?'

It was common to hear how members perceive Troutt as someone who genuinely wants feedback and they feel comfortable telling him what they think without any repercussions. "The fact that you can tell the president he is dead wrong without worrying about the consequences," creates an environment that supports CQI. Two stories best illustrate that Troutt has worked to drive out fear:

I know I have confronted Bill openly in meetings. I have never seen him become defensive about that, in front of a group. One time I told him that he was the problem and I gave him a specific example. He was unaware of the situation, but after he was made aware his reaction was, 'Well how can we overcome that? That kind of confidence in yourself invites openness.

There is also a contagious nature of giving and receiving feedback in the other people in leadership roles. One internal planning meeting had to do with finances concerning what information should and should not be disclosed. I was pushing the group to not withhold any information. We were having a heated dialogue about these items. Finally, I expressed why I was so adamant in my position. When the meeting was over, everyone was fine with me and likewise, even though we were going at it tooth and nail. After the meeting, we were the same people who we were before and I think it is a reflection of Bill Troutt that we can confront one another without falling out. He cultivates a culture which separates the issues from the personalities so that improvements can take place.

Yet, another said:

He has told me several times, 'What I need is somebody who will tell me when I am dead wrong.' This conveys to me that everyone has value. We can disagree, but we can still be friends. We can express our differences and we have an obligation to have opinions. There are still people who want to say what Bill wants to hear. But I think it is Bill's desire for a cadre of people who feel comfortable in expressing contrary opinions. It is very invigorating to come to a consensus after this kind of discussion.

Driving fear out of the institution and creating a culture that encourages open communication and feedback is a long term process. At Belmont, members learn how to give and receive feedback through education and development. They realize that people typically think of feedback as criticism and therefore, there is a natural tendency to get defensive. As one administrator commented:

All of the data collected goes to senior leadership, plus I send a memo to every party who needs to know. Every comment that pertains to a certain area goes to that area. And I do a lot of reminders of what feedback is. Since I do not like sending out feedback cold, I remind them over e-mail about the value of feedback and then I call them.

But as one person warned:

You can't go from ground zero to a culture free from fear. People have to understand the concepts of giving feedback and receiving feedback. We have been able to develop that understanding for the most part. People understand that this continuous data collection and feedback is for improvement, even though sometimes it is hard to swallow.

As one member emphatically stated:

I hesitate to talk about these things as if they are religious experiences, but it is the same thing as walking the Christian life. You have to have somebody in your life who is going to speak truth to your heart; someone who is going to call you on the carpet when you do something that should be improved.

Troutt welcomes feedback and encourages confrontation without getting defensive, but he also understands the value of giving and receiving positive feedback, as well. He pays attention to details and realizes that praise is free. In a time of tight budgets, positive feedback can be a powerful intrinsic reward. Several acknowledged these actions by saying that he sends numerous handwritten notes commending people for their good work, particularly for any awards received. They mentioned how Troutt makes these notes meaningful so they are not mistaken for a form letter.

Yet, feedback is only meaningful if people listen. A key to Troutt's effectiveness is attributed to his ability to sincerely listen. He is described as someone who "appreciates the challenge of a different idea." There was a general consensus that he listens to them, supports their ideas, and respects their opinions. Several examples make this point:

If there is something that he is concerned about, a decision he was getting ready to make, or a problem he was going to deal with in a certain way, he would ask me, 'If I do such and such what kind of response do you think I will get?' This indicates to me that he is sensitive to how decisions are going to be perceived. He is really concerned about how people are going to respond to things. He is also responsive to suggestions I might make about how to deal with situations. One time I told him that he should talk directly to the faculty about this and in a few weeks he had a public forum. He has done a good job of trying to hear what is going on and then to create as much communication as possible.

He liked the term Teaching Improvement Center. Another title was recommended, but we went with the title he preferred. After several months, we received some negative comments from faculty about the title because they felt it sounded too remedial. We

started noticing that most people were referring to it as The Teaching Center. So I told Troutt about the feedback and I recommended that we change the name. He reaction was to go with the name term with which most people are most comfortable. This may be a small thing, but he demonstrates a sensitivity to others and actually listens.

People described him as "someone who makes you feel attended to even though he may not be able to answer in the way you wish or do exactly what you want him to do." According to one administrator who has worked with him since he arrived at Belmont:

He has changed and I think it can all be summed up by saying that he listens to people more than he did before CQI. He is much more open to feedback. He always encourages people to tell him if they do not feel right about a situation. He makes it easy to talk with him because there are not a lot of barriers. He does make people feel they have been heard.

Upon further examination, Troutt takes certain actions that influence others to take actions. His constancy of purpose (Deming, 1986) combined with his positive attitude is similar to the "little engine that could." His attitude says, "I think I can. I think I can" and he moves the train north. Figure 2 is a model that emerged from these themes and serves as a metaphor for significant leadership actions. The themes have a spiral effect in that they help members develop a commitment so that they want to get on board and they provide the momentum for moving the train north. Most of these actions are reciprocal in effect and act as a never-ending system when the actions happen consistently and regularly.

CONCLUSIONS

"He lets us make things happen," is a theme throughout this study that best summarizes Troutt's leadership actions. Based on the findings from this study, Troutt has created an environment where members thrive because they are working together to improve the institution. He has done this by designing systems that are supportive and inclusive.

One conclusion is that what he says is important, he demonstrates in his actions and behaviors. Troutt believes leaders should behave in consistent and credible ways and that is how his team perceives him. By analyzing the behaviors and actions of this leader, it is easier to understand what is involved in successfully leading continuous improvement efforts in higher education. This study reveals that a new type of leadership is required; one that engages colleagues in the process so that they share in the vision of the institution. Leaders who set the example by being willing to take risks and get involved in actions help members feel comfortable doing the same. These behaviors also help members have the courage necessary to make changes and improvements. Having a yearning for learning is important in being a leader of CQI. As this study indicates, learning to be a leader takes time and effort in order to "walk the talk."

In addition to revealing specific personal characteristics, other themes emerge in the category of interpersonal dynamics and these themes are reciprocal and interdependent. When Troutt demonstrates commitment, others become more committed. When Troutt is open with

others and trusts them, others are open with him and trust him. When he involves others, they are more trusting and committed. When he receives feedback without getting defensive, others are more likely to give direct and honest feedback. Likewise, inspiring commitment and alignment to the mission and vision is facilitated when relationships are open and members trust one another. Openness and trust increases when members are involved and empowered. All of these actions are easier to accomplish when communication flows openly and people understand the power of giving and receiving feedback.

In all of Troutt's actions, it became clear that paying attention to the details is critical. The smallest actions can reap the largest returns in terms of loyalty, commitment, quality, and innovation. Most important of all is the fact that Troutt makes learning an intentional act. He understands that in every way, every day, leading CQI efforts is a commitment to continuous improvement. "It is only that lasting bond of commitment, that finally determines the success or failure of any change effort" (Filipczak, 1996, p. 64).

This study indicates that leadership is a constant process of moving people onto the train. Once the leader announces the departure, the other leadership actions are focused on pulling people on board. It is the specific leadership actions, sometimes of the smallest degree, that provide a synergistic affect in running the institution and moving the train north. One member said it best:

> *He has recognized that his job is to be a leader, not to be a micromanager. He went and received training in what his job is, not what my job is. That is hard for most college presidents because they think their business is running the institution. But that is our job and his job is to be a leader. If he hires and surrounds himself with good people and provides an environment where we are motivated, he is being an effective leader. Then the institution is going to run because we are doing the running.*

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Figure 2. Leadership Actions That Provide Momentum

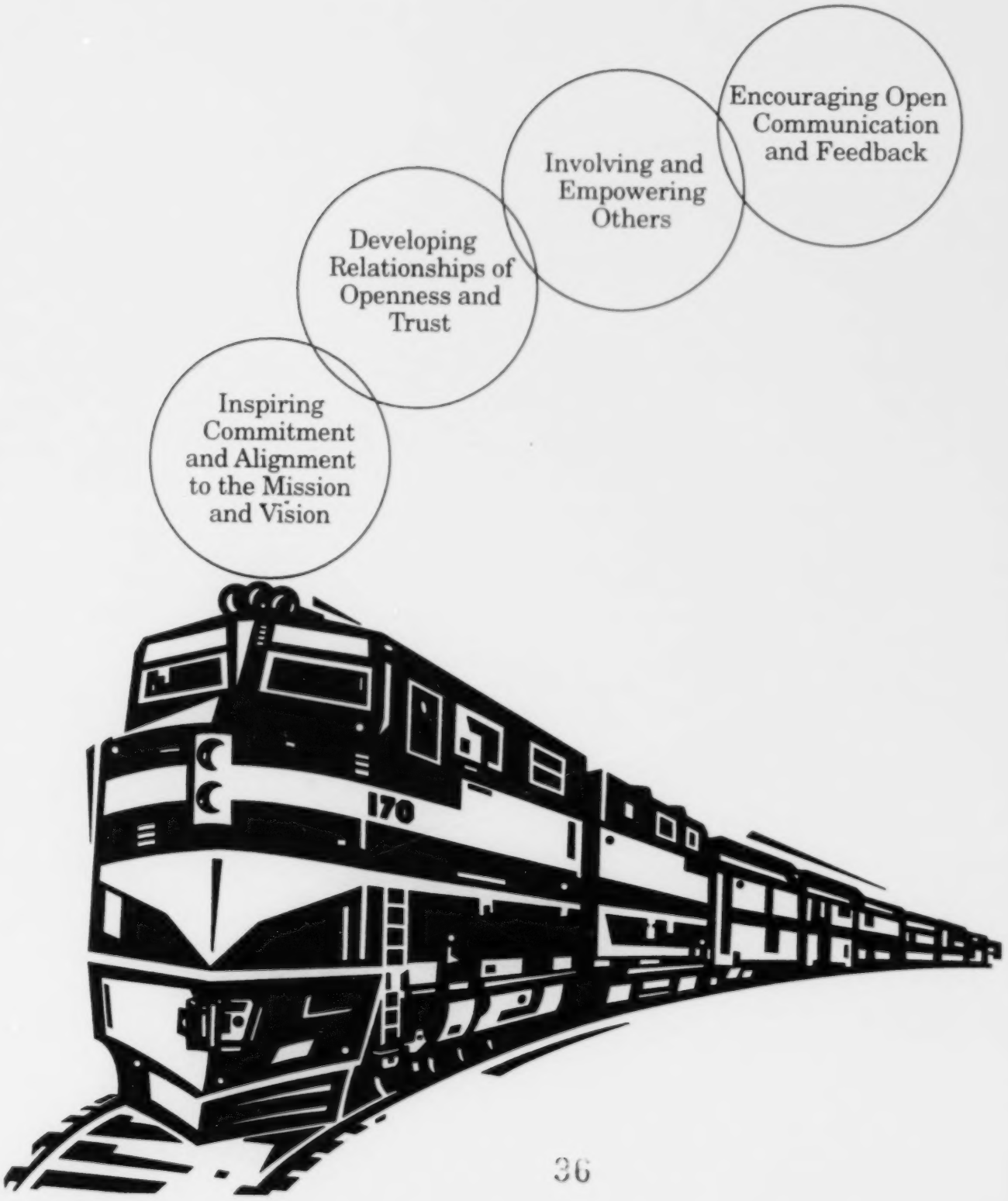
Encouraging Open Communication and Feedback
Involving and Empowering Others
Developing Relationships of Openness and Trust
Inspiring Commitment and Alignment to the Mission and Vision
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Figure 1. Quality Practices in Higher Education Institutions